



Central Peninsula Church

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Philippians 2:12-13
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Gospel Growth

SERIES: Philippians: A People and A Place Transformed by the Gospel

Are you guys enjoying your weekend? Well, I've been enjoying my weekend. Yesterday I got to spend a few hours doing something I love to do. One of my all time favorite things to do is ride my bike. I love to ride bikes. Now, I don't ride those lightweight, thin tire, Tour de France kind of bikes. That kind of bike riding is called cycling. And apparently, if you're into cycling there's this rule—I don't know where it comes from but everyone seems to adhere to it—this ungodly rule, that if you're going to ride that kind of a bike you've got to wear spandex. I just can't do that. I don't even own any spandex. My wife has told me before that it would be kind of nice for her if I bought a pair of spandex and just walked around in them, wore them around the house sometimes. But when my wife says stuff like that I can never tell if she's serious or if she's just joking. There also seems to be this additional ungodly cycling rule that many guys follow, and that's that you must shave your legs and get them looking nice and shiny so they glimmer in the sun. My legs are nice but they're not shiny. They're pretty hairy. So for all those reasons I stay away from cycling.

The other reason I stay away from that kind of bike riding is because I don't like riding uphill. I like riding downhill. I ride a big mountain bike and I'm involved in what's known as downhill mountain biking. I've even entered a few downhill mountain biking races before because I just love to get on my bike and charge down a hill or a mountain as fast as I can while navigating jumps and rocks and obstacles on the way down. I love that I can do this kind of bike riding without spandex and without shiny legs. And as I was riding my bike this weekend I was thinking about how this love for riding bikes first began.

It began one afternoon when I was six years old. My dad and I drove to K-mart and together we picked out my first bike. We picked this particular bike because it was silver, it was fast, and...it was cheap. After we got home from the store, I showed off my new bike to my mom and then immediately my dad took me out for my first and only bike riding lesson. And as we walked down our driveway I asked my dad what we were going to do since my bike didn't have training wheels like all the other kid's bikes had. My dad looked me in the eye and said just two words: "trust me." And so that's what I did.

My dad was holding onto the bike by the back of the seat. My bike had a banana seat and so there was this small metal bar in the back of the seat where a father's hand fit perfectly. My dad held onto this bar and told me to hop onto the bike, grab the handle bars, and put my feet on the pedals. Then, my dad said, "pedal." And before I could even start pedaling, my dad started pushing. Before I knew it I was pedaling my way along our street while my dad ran behind me, holding onto the bar and pushing me forward.

The whole time my dad was talking to me. I couldn't see him, but he was constantly talking to me, telling me how to steer and keep the bike straight and keep my feet on the pedals. I remember every few minutes I kept asking, "are you still holding on dad...are you still there?" And my dad would say, "yes son, I'm here." And my dad kept pushing and I kept pedaling. Then, after about 30 minutes of this I was pedaling along in the middle of the street and I hadn't heard my dad's voice in a while so I said, "dad, are you still there, are you still pushing me?" All I heard was silence. No answer. So I looked over my right shoulder and saw my dad about 40 yards behind me—he had let go a long time ago. Our eyes met and my dad shouted, "you've got it Justin, look forward, keep pedaling, keep pedaling." So I kept pedaling and I didn't fall. I learned how to ride a bike that day.

I tell you this story because many people approach the Christian life the way I experienced learning how to ride a bike. Many people mistakenly believe that when it comes to living the Christian life, God, just like my dad, bought the bike, set us on the bike and taught us how to ride by holding onto us and pushing us forward, but at some point, God just lets go, stops pushing, and leaves it up to us to pedal our way forward, to do all the work of growth and progress in the faith.

Today's text addresses this common misunderstanding. Today's text addresses how we grow as Christians, how we keep pedaling. Today we're looking at just two verses, Philippians 2:12-13. Last Sunday we had nine verses and it took me about 40 minutes to preach that sermon so if you do the math that means this sermon should take us just about 10 minutes. But I'm going to take more than 10 minutes today because

today's two verses are huge. What we've got today are two verses, one sentence of Bible, 45 words in the Greek text which translates out to 49 words in my English translation. And these two verses, this single sentence, these 49 words, serve as the clearest explanation in the Bible of how we grow as Christians.

Now, what I'm eventually going to do today is melt these 49 words down to just seven words—to a short, seven-word phrase that sums up what the apostle Paul is saying to the Philippians and to us in this passage. But before we do that I want us to travel together, I want us to go through these two verses line by line and discover together Paul's logic of how we're to approach this business of growing, of pedaling forward in the Christian life. What we're going to see is that Paul's logic hinges on *both* a command and a promise. But before we get to Paul's command and before we get to his promise, we've got to begin where he begins, and that's with some preliminary matters. So, if you're the kind of person who likes to have an outline of where we're going, here you go—as we travel together through these 49 words we're going to stop and look first, at the preliminaries, second, at the command, and third, at the promise regarding Christian growth.

I. The Preliminaries (v. 12a)

If you haven't done so already, please open your Bibles to Philippians 2:12–13. We begin with the preliminaries, the first half of verse 12. Let me read this for you. Paul begins, “**Therefore...**” Okay, we need to stop right here.

“Therefore” is one of the most important words in the Bible. If, as you read the Bible, you skip over “therefores” you'll get into trouble and confusion and maybe even heresy because you'll miss crucial connections that the biblical writers are making with this one little word. Whenever you come across the word “therefore” in Scripture, you need to pause and ask yourself the question, “What is this therefore there for?”

Last week we encountered an important “therefore” in verse 9. Remember that? Remember that verse 9 of that great hymn about Christ began with the word “therefore”? We saw that Christ died a humble death on the cross, *therefore* God exalted Christ. “Therefores” are the superglue of the Bible. The biblical writers use this little word to glue together ideas, truths, promises, and commands that are not meant to be understood in isolation but are meant to be understood in connection with, glued together with, other ideas, truths, promises, and commands.

Last week in verse 9 God had a “therefore.” This week, here in verse 12, we see that the church also has a “therefore.” So, what is *this* therefore there for? Well,

these 2 verses are glued together with, they're an outworking of, verses 5-11. Last week in verses 5-11 Paul gave us this incredible theology of who Christ is, of Christ's humble movement from heaven, to earth, and back to heaven. For Paul, theology must always be applied. The word theology simply means “truths about God” and you'll never find a place in the Bible where Paul lays out theology, where Paul lays out some truths about God, and doesn't also apply that truth to people's lives. Paul always takes his theology and says, now, this is what it means for you to apply these truths to how you live your lives in Philippi, or on the Peninsula, or wherever.

So, that's what *this* therefore is there for. Paul is now taking these incredible truths about who Christ is and what Christ has done and applying it to the Philippians. It's really important that you see this. Before Paul commands the church, before he lays out applications for them, he first showers them with the truth of how great and good, how kind and loving, God is. All of Paul's applications and commands are in response to, out of gratitude for, who God is and what God has done through Christ.

Let's keep reading. Verse 12 says, “**Therefore, my beloved...**” We need to stop again. This is important. Before Paul tells the Philippians what to do, he expresses his love for them. Do you do relationships this way? Before you speak into someone's life, do you first express your love and care for them?

I'll tell you what, Paul's a great model for me. As I study this book, Paul's teaching me what it means to be a loving pastor and husband and father and friend. It is so much more honoring of the gospel for me to express my love and care for a person before I speak into their life some sort of command or counsel. So, before I give you any commands or counsel today, as one of your pastors let me just tell you that I love you. Central Peninsula Church, I consider you “my beloved.” I love this church. I love you. This sermon is a sermon addressed to my beloved. I prayed for you all week as I prepared and wrote this message. I love you.

Let's continue with our reading of verse 12, Paul says, “**Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed...**” Here, Paul affirms the Philippians' past obedience. He recognizes their obedient track record before issuing them a command. The Philippian church was a church known for its commitment to the gospel and its habit of hospitality and generosity, and Paul takes note of this. And again, this is a great model for us. Before we speak into one another's lives on matters of

Christian growth and maturity, let's first *both* express our love for one another and let's affirm how we've seen past evidence of grace and obedience in one another's lives.

Paul has used the superglue word—therefore. He's expressed love for the Philippians, he's affirmed the Philippians, and now he states one more preliminary matter before delivering his command to the Philippians. Paul says, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, *so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence...*"

Right after this line Paul gives his command and what he's doing here, immediately before his command, is telling the Philippians that their obedience and growth in Christ is not dependent on the presence of a particular leader. In fact, Paul's calling the church to exercise even more obedience with the absence of their favorite leader. Paul, the pastor who first brought the gospel to Philippi and first shepherded this young church, the pastor/leader who the Philippians hold so dear, is very far away. Paul's nowhere near Philippi; he's in Rome. And Paul's saying, "in light of my absence, you ought to be even more obedient to Christ and to the leaders Christ has given you."

What this means for us at CPC, one way for us to apply what Paul's saying here, is that no matter who's standing up here on a Sunday, whether it's Mark Mitchell, Justin Buzzard, Steve Aurell, or someone else who's doing the preaching, you need to be here. You need to show up. I don't think this is much of an issue here right now, but I've been told that in past years, our Sunday morning attendance would fluctuate. It would be up or down, based on who was preaching. That's sad. Paul's saying that it's a mark of immaturity for a particular leader to determine your obedience to Christ or your Sunday morning attendance here.

II. The Command (v. 12b)

So that was all preliminary. We've traveled through the preliminaries and now we come to the command. Paul's gospel-soaked preliminaries have paved the way for him to issue a command to the church he loves. Here's the command in the second half of verse 12, where Paul says, "**work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**"

That's a big command. And I think the best way to understand this command is for us to look first at what this command does not say.

This verse does not say work *for* your salvation. There's only one person who has worked for your salvation and that's Jesus Christ. He alone worked for your salvation. This word salvation means rescue. In saving us, Jesus has rescued us from sin and death and brought us into a whole new way of life. Christianity isn't a religion;

it's a rescue. The gospel isn't advice; it's good news. Christianity isn't religious advice about how to live a better life; it's good news about a rescue, about a Savior who has rescued sinners into a totally new way of life.

Everybody wants salvation. Everybody wants rescue. But most people want to rescue themselves. Most people want to rescue themselves because they think they can do it. They think that if they just work hard enough they can earn their salvation and experience that rescue they long for. But that's not a rescue at all. That's religion. That's pride. That's trying to be your own Savior. And Paul would never command such a thing as working *for* your salvation.

Nor does Paul command the church here to work *on* their salvation. Our salvation cannot be improved upon. The rescue is complete. The salvation equation is very simple: Christ = salvation. There's no plus sign in this equation. You dishonor Christ if you try to add a plus sign—if you try to work *on* your salvation—because a plus sign suggests that Christ's sacrifice on the cross wasn't enough for you.

So, what does this verse command? The command is to work *out* your salvation. This is the fourth command in Philippians and with this command Paul's telling the church to work out what is already theirs. "Work out your rescue," Paul is saying. One thing that we can't see in our English translations is that in the Greek this command is actually the very last word of this verse. So as the Philippians first read this verse, they'd hear it like this: "with fear and trembling, the salvation that is yours, work out." So, opposite of our English translations, the Philippians would've first read about their salvation and then, at the end of the verse, of their responsibility to work out this salvation that's already theirs. I think knowing that helps us to better see the garden of grace in which this command is planted. A little later we'll talk more specifically about what it means, what it looks like, to obey this command and work out your salvation, but I don't want to do that until we talk about the promise that's here in this text.

Before we get to that promise let me just say that you shouldn't let these two little words, "fear" and "trembling," scare you. Paul says that the action of working out our salvation is to be accompanied by an attitude of fear and trembling. And the reason Paul can say this in a letter that's saturated with themes of joy and gladness is that these two little words simply mean "awe" and "reverence." That's another way of translating them. So the idea isn't, have an attitude of terror and fright as you work out

your salvation, *but* have an attitude of awe and reverence before the Almighty God as you work out what he's done for you.

III. The Promise (v. 13)

Now we come to the promise, verse 13. On the heels of his command, Paul says, **“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”**

Did you see the glue there? Did you see the word “for”? This word is biblical superglue just like the word “therefore.” With this word “for” Paul joins verse 12 and verse 13 together. Paul joins together what many Christians try and separate. Friends, do not be a Philippians 2:12 Christian. And, my friends, do not be a Philippians 2:13 Christian. Be a Philippians 2:12–13 Christian.

Many people are living Philippians 2:12 lives. Philippians 2:12 is what defines their approach to Christian growth. These are people like the late Cardinal Francis Spellman. He once wrote a sentence that's become a somewhat famous quote about Christian growth. He said, “Pray as if everything depended on God and work as if everything depended on man.” That's terrible theology. This passage is about work. The word “work” shows up three times in our text and Paul doesn't tell us to work as if everything depended on us. If this Cardinal Spellman guy were right, we might as well go home. I might as well never preach again. There's no hope for any of us to grow as Christians if all the work depends on us. If the apostle Paul could've been there when Cardinal Spellman wrote that terrible sentence, Paul would've taken him outside and given him the right hand of fellowship.

Living the Philippians 2:12 life leads to legalism. If you make this your life verse you're going to become an annoying little legalist who nobody wants to be around because you think the Christian life is about working as if everything depends on you, as if God's not in the equation and what matters is always being on your best, most moral, most perfectionistic behavior. Some of you in this room need to repent of approaching Christian growth with only this verse in your back pocket.

Now, many other people are living Philippians 2:13 lives. These are the people who drive cars with bumper stickers that say, “Let go and let God.” “God's doing the work and so I just relax, let go, and do nothing.” Trying to live a Philippians 2:12 life leads to legalism; trying to live a Philippians 2:13 life leads to laziness. Some of you in this room need to repent of your laziness. For some of you, it's like the only verse you've ever read is Philippians 2:13. Ten years ago, you read this verse, you bought your “Let go and let God” bumper sticker, and now a decade of your life has passed by and you've done a

bunch of letting but no growing in your walk with Christ.

As Christians, we're called to live Philippians 2:12–13 lives. Let me explain what this means. This word salvation is a big word. It covers the full scope of God's rescue operation towards sinners. And so Paul uses this big word in different ways on different occasions. Sometimes Paul uses this word to refer to our Justification in Christ, and sometimes to refer to our Sanctification in Christ. So it's important that we review these two different uses and get clear on how exactly Paul's using this word “salvation” in this passage.

This is theology 101 and it's crucial that you get this dialed in. In the Christian alphabet, just as in the English alphabet, “J” comes before “S”. Our Justification comes before our Sanctification.

Justification occurs when you first become a Christian. Justification is a onetime event and God does all the work. The only thing we contribute to our Justification is the sin we need saving from. Justification is the one time event in which God declares a guilty sinner to be justified—God declares a sinner to be *both* forgiven and righteous through the blood of Jesus, by faith.

That's Justification. Sanctification is different. Sanctification is not a one time event, it's a process. Sanctification is our ongoing process of growth in Christ. You can never become more justified or forgiven or loved by God than you were on the day God first justified you when you became a Christian. But, you can take hold of and grow into this new identity more and more and that's what Sanctification is all about. In our Justification, God does all the work and we simply receive his gift. But in the Sanctification process, the growth process, we're active, not passive. We have work to do.

Quiz time! You should all get 100% on this quiz. As Paul uses the word salvation in this text, is he referring to our Justification or our Sanctification? This is a text about Sanctification, about the process of growth in Christ.

And to have a healthy understanding of your ongoing Sanctification, you've got to hold onto both of today's verses. You've got to be a Philippians 2:12–13 Christian. One sign of Christian maturity is that you're comfortable with paradox and mystery. You're comfortable with the fact that as you pursue growth in Christ, as you walk through the doorway of Sanctification, you see above the doorway Philippians 2:12, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” and it feels like a lot of work. But as you pass through the doorway and look back above

the doorway on the other side, you see Philippians 2:13, "it is God who works in you."

The sporting goods store Champs has a motto, a slogan, that reads, "You get out what You put in." And see, this makes sense to us. This seems obvious. We're a workout obsessed culture and we believe that we're only going to get out what we put in. If we want results, if we want to get out, we better put in. But, when it comes to our Sanctification, the Bible presents us with a different logic. Today's text tells us that we get out what God puts in.

I told you I'd eventually melt Paul's 49 words down to 7 words for us. So, here you go, here's the logic, here's the mystery, here's the gospel of this text: Christians work out what God works in.

If you're attempting to live the Christian life any other way, you're not really living the Christian life. If you're trying to grow as a Christian through the sporting goods store equation, "You get out what You put in," you don't understand the gospel and you're surely not experiencing much growth and change. The biblical equation for Christian growth is "you get out what God puts in." Christians work out what God works in.

God is the one who worked *for* our salvation and he's still the one who works *in* us to work *out* our salvation. What this means is this: God never let go of the bike. He never lets go of the bike. Unlike my father who let go of the bike and quit pushing, leaving me to pedal on my own, our Heavenly Father is still holding onto us, he's still pushing us. And because he's pushing, we pedal, we work it out.

Before we ever started pedaling forward in the Christian life, our Father was behind us, pushing us on. And our Father will never stop pushing us forward. That's one of the great promises of this book. Remember how Paul prayed for the Philippians right at the beginning of this letter? In his prayer Paul claimed a Sanctification promise. He said **"I am sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion"** (1:6). Paul didn't say that the Philippians would bring this salvation work to completion, he said God would do it. Nevertheless, Paul still commands the Philippians to get on their bikes, pedal hard, and work it out.

And this logic is found throughout the Bible. In Colossians 1:29, as Paul talks about his job as a pastor, Paul says, **"For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."** Here's another example, Hebrews 13:21. At the very end of this long letter, the writer of Hebrews gives a little benediction and this is what he prays, **"[May God] equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ..."**

The Bible teaches that growth in Christ is a working out of what God works in. And did you see that our two verses tell us that God works in us in two ways? The text says that God works in us *"both to will and to work."* If we didn't have this little word "will" right here, the good news of this text wouldn't be as good. It's great that God's working in us to work out and grow as Christians. But God's doing far more than that! God's working in us to will; he's giving us the desire to grow in him! That's where the problem is a lot of the time, isn't it? We know we should mature and grow in Christ, but the desire, the will, isn't there. This little word "will" is so precious. God is at work in our lives and in this church to give us the will, the desire, to grow in him.

About 3,000 years ago, after a dark season of sin in his life, King David prayed a prayer that's based on the truth of this verse. After owning and repenting of his sin, in Psalm 51 David prayed, **"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me...Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit"** (Ps. 51:10,12). David's saying, "God, give me a willing spirit, give me the joy, the desire, to do your will." And with Philippians 2:13, God answers David's prayer. God gives us the will to walk with him.

Do you lack the desire, do you lack the will, to pedal forward and grow in Christ? If that's you this morning, pray like David and trust that God's at work in you on your will.

God's at work in us both to will and to work. He's working in us as we work out. Our growth in Christ is not like a weight loss program. Your Sanctification can't be packaged, programmed, and laid out as a list of steps to take, things to do, what to eat, what to not eat, and so on. I can't tell each of you here how exactly you are to work out your salvation, because Paul doesn't do that with the Philippians. All I can say is this: look back at your Father, look up at your Father, gaze on him through the Word, through prayer, and through involvement with this church, and he will tell you how he wants you to work out your salvation. As a young boy, when I turned my head and looked at my father, he shouted, "look forward and keep pedaling." As you look at your Heavenly Father, he will make it clear how exactly he's calling you to pedal.

This ought to humble us this morning. In the Christian life we have only one thing that we can boast about, and that's our Savior. If you're a non-Christian here this morning, you can be saved too. None of us Christians here were smart enough, good enough, or clever enough to save ourselves. Jesus

saved us. The only thing we contributed to the deal was our sin. And the only thing we contribute to our ongoing growth in Christ is a working out of what he is working in—a pedaling in response to his pushing. We're justified by faith in a great God *and* we're sanctified by faith in a great God. And that ought to humble us.

But one of the worst things we could do here would be to put on a false humility where we're shy about encouraging one another. This text actually gives us great warrant for encouraging one another by pointing out how we see God at work in each other's lives. All week I've been thinking how great it would be if we were a church that was constantly pointing out evidences of grace in one another's lives. So rather than me simply telling all of you to do this, let me do this.

Ronnie Inzunza—God is at work in you. I've seen God use you to encourage and love others here at CPC. You've probably been the single biggest encourager I've had here. We're honored to have you as a part of our church body.

Jen Frietas—God is at work in you. I've seen God use you here at CPC to reach out to and love lonely people. We're so thankful to have you as a part of our church body.

Celia Peckham—God is at work in you to serve others. You serve this church in so many capacities. We love having you as a part of our church body.

Do you guys realize that when we do this we give God pleasure? Our text says that the reason why we're on a mission to work out what God works in is—look at the last four words of the text—“for his good pleasure.” What an incredible motivation that is! As we grow in Christ and as we point out how we see one another growing in Christ, we give God pleasure. Our God is a happy God, he's a God who knows pleasure. And as we obey him and pedal forward we magnify his pleasure. Psalm 147:11 says, “**The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.**” God takes pleasure in us as we obey him and trust his steadfast love.

CONCLUSION

One person who really got this was Eric Liddell. Have you guys heard of Eric Liddell before? Eric Liddell's story is told in the movie *Chariots of Fire*, one of my all time favorite movies. There's this scene in the movie where Eric Liddell, who's a Christian and who's putting his missionary career on hold for a bit so that he can run in the Olympic games, is talking with his sister who is angry with him for letting his running get in the way of his mission work. So his sister expresses her frustration and then Eric looks at his sister, Jenny, and says, “Jenny, I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel his pleasure.”

And what the movie *Chariots of Fire* then goes on to do is show us the lives of two men who run fast for two very different reasons. Along with Eric Liddell we get to know Harold Abrahams. Abrahams is also very fast and he also earns a spot at the Olympic games. But Abrahams' motivation in running is totally different from Eric Liddell's. Abrahams is a character who has spent his whole life striving and working, running as fast as he can in order to win approval. Abrahams runs for salvation. His whole motive for running is a religious motivation, an attempt to work hard enough and run fast enough to win approval and acceptance. But Eric Liddell runs because he feels God's pleasure. He runs fast because he knows he's already been accepted and approved by God. When Eric Liddell runs, he's simply working out what God works in.

Salvation is what the world wants. Everybody wants salvation, rescue, and approval. But most people are chasing after salvation like Harold Abrahams. They're running as fast as they can, they're pedaling with all their might, thinking that if they just work hard enough, they'll rescue themselves, win the approval they crave, and all will be well.